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General Assembly

Sixtieth session

Official Records

59th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 30 November 2005, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Eliasson ..... (Sweden)

In the absence of the President, Ms. Bahemuka (Kenya), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 15 (*continued*)

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/60/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/60/539)

Draft resolutions (A/60/L.28, A/60/L.29, A/60/L.30 and A/60/L.31)

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): We concur with the 26 July 2005 statement of the Security Council (*see A/60/539, para. 3*) that the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, remains among the most important items on the agenda of the United Nations. Pakistan has consistently supported all bilateral and multilateral efforts aimed at the peaceful resolution of the question of Palestine in all its aspects. The vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, has been embraced by the entire international community. We must all work to realize that vision. Pakistan eagerly looks forward to the early establishment of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, which would fulfil the decades-old quest of the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination.

It is heartening to note that in the period under review, despite sporadic violence, a number of positive developments have taken place. These include: a ceasefire and agreement to end violence, resulting in greater restraint in Israeli military activities and a decrease in the number of deaths and injuries compared with the similar period last year; the withdrawal of all Israeli forces from Gaza in September 2005 and the transfer of control of five West Bank cities to the Palestinian Authority; increased coordination between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority since the Sharm el-Sheikh summit in February 2005; the recent agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority to open the Gaza borders, which will permit the freer movement of Palestinians; and the release of a number of Palestinian prisoners. The electoral dynamics both in Israel and in Gaza and the West Bank may also create positive momentum.

Nevertheless, one cannot disregard the challenges ahead: the continued restrictions on and the suffering of the Palestinian people; the continuing construction of the separation wall; the continued settlement activity in the West Bank; and incidents of violence, which unfortunately continue to occur.

What is most important, at this stage, is that both parties demonstrate their clear commitment to implement the further steps set out in the Quartet's road map, including a withdrawal from the West Bank leading to the establishment of a Palestinian State.

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Thereafter, the so-called final-status issues — especially Jerusalem and the refugees — will also need to be resolved in accordance with the road map and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

As they continue to implement the road map and the relevant Security Council resolutions — especially resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) — the parties also need to take several other immediate steps: first, ensuring the safety and well-being of all civilians on both sides and a complete cessation of all acts of violence, including military attacks, destruction and acts of terror; secondly, freezing and halting all settlement expansion activities, removing illegal settlement outposts and ending further construction of the security fence in the West Bank, which encroaches on what is Palestinian land; thirdly, the continued development of the political process on the Palestinian territories and reform and reinforcement of Palestinian institutions; and fourthly, international assistance to the Palestinian people and to the Palestinian Authority.

Of course, the international community's political support for the peace process remains crucial. Simultaneously, there is a pressing need for the economic reconstruction and rehabilitation of the occupied Palestinian territories. We welcome the Gleneagles Group of Eight Summit pledge of $3 billion in aid to the Palestinian Authority. That example needs to be followed by the entire international community to help the Palestinian Authority to overcome the wide-ranging problems facing the Palestinian people, especially in the economic and social sectors.

The international community should focus its attention on the recommendations of the Quartet's Special Envoy, Mr. Wolfensohn, in particular the recommendations to help the Palestinian Authority overcome its fiscal crisis and achieve fiscal stabilization, as well as to implement quick-impact economic programmes.

For several decades, the denial of Palestinian rights, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the occupation of Palestinian territories have radiated to create an environment of anger, insecurity and confrontation in the Middle East and the Islamic world. The solution of the Palestine issue will produce a positive effect of equal magnitude in the region, promoting the prospects of resolving other political, social and economic problems that afflict the region and advancing the aims of international peace and security.

Mr. Adekanye (Nigeria): On behalf of the delegation of Nigeria, I wish to express our appreciation for the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*A/60/35*), and to commend its Bureau, under the chairmanship of Senegal, for the efforts made in fulfilling its mandate. Undoubtedly, the exertions of the Committee have helped shine a much-needed searchlight on the plight of the Palestinian people, the issue of whose rehabilitation through the creation of a viable Palestinian State is at the centre of the Middle East crisis. In Nigeria's view, unless the question of Palestine is confronted in all its ramifications, the well-considered efforts of the international community will come to naught.

A just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question requires of both sides in the conflict a genuine commitment to forswear the use of violence in the pursuit of their objectives. That is the only way to create an atmosphere conducive to confidence and trust. It also demands of both sides the courage to rein in those elements that are afraid of the future because of past experiences. The ghosts of the past can be exorcised only when the seeds of hope for the future are planted. Nigeria believes that the time to plant such seeds is now. We therefore salute both the Israeli Government and the Palestinian National Authority for their efforts in that regard.

A commitment to peaceful dialogue and respect for agreements reached as a result thereof will be consistent with the principle of an independent Palestinian State existing side by side with the State of Israel within secure borders. This also would be consistent with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), among others. Nigeria, therefore, calls for an urgent resumption of negotiations within the framework of the Quartet, in order to build on the momentum provided by recent positive developments in the region.

Nigeria welcomes the recent pullout of Israeli forces and settlements from the Gaza and commends the Rafah border agreement to facilitate the movement of the Palestinian people. As President Olusegun Obasanjo, current Chairman of the African Union, declared in his message on the occasion of the

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People yesterday (*see A/AC.183/PV.290*),

> "the recent removal of Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank, including the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and the opening of the Rafah border crossing by the President of the Palestinian Authority [are] helpful signs for peace. These specific steps should serve to galvanize action of the parties in particular, and the international community in general, towards a definitive solution that will bring peace to the region as a whole".

The leaders at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit of February 2005 reaffirmed their vision and commitment and created a momentum that we should not allow to wane or to fail.

With respect to the Syrian Golan Heights, Nigeria calls on the parties to adopt flexibility and to resume peace negotiations under the principle of land for peace, which, in our view, will guarantee much-needed peace and security in the region. We regard resolutions 56/31, 56/32, 57/111 and 57/128, on Jerusalem and on the Syrian Golan, as well as Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981), among others, as providing the valuable framework for such a peace. Their implementation would help to address the security concerns that have inhibited a solution. Such a course of action would enhance the attainment of a just and comprehensive peace and would create a climate of trust for the much-needed development in the region. We trust that the international community will continue to be engaged with both sides in the search for peace.

Nigeria wishes, in this regard, to express appreciation to James Wolfensohn, the Quartet's Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement, for his tenacity and commitment, and to Alvaro de Soto, the new United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, and his team, for their hard work. Their efforts deserve the unwavering support of the international community in general and of the parties to the conflict in particular.

Finally, it is equally appropriate to commend the valiant efforts of the officials of the United Nations system and the international community, in particular the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, who over the years have invested their time and energies in the cause of peace and security in the region. Their example and their commitment should elicit a commensurate response from the international community to turn the Middle East into a region where all its peoples can live in peace and harmony.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): At the outset, on behalf of the delegation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, I should like to express our appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the work it has done with the objective of promoting a solution to the Palestinian issue.

The international community has, for many decades, repeatedly called for a peaceful resolution of the question of Palestine. It is regrettable to note that, despite the great efforts exerted, fewer tangible results have been achieved. As reflected in the report contained in document A/60/35, the violence has been continuing unabated, causing great suffering to and taking the lives of the peoples of the region, mostly the Palestinian people. In that regard, we urge the parties concerned to stop the violence and all acts that could increase tensions and confrontation. Both sides need to exercise maximum restraint and resume negotiations as a precondition leading towards the implementation of the Quartet's road map, as well as relevant Security Council resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

This year, although the situation remains difficult and complex, we have witnessed some progress, including the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and four small settlements in the northern West Bank. In our opinion, such steps should be further promoted. However, further progress will be unlikely if efforts to expand the settlements in the West Bank and to complete the construction of the wall on Palestinian land — which are contrary to international law and numerous resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, as well as the provisions of the road map — are not abandoned.

Peace and stability in the Middle East are not likely to be achieved unless the Palestinian issue is resolved in a just and reasonable manner. In that regard, the Lao People's Democratic Republic reaffirms its unswerving support for the struggle of the Palestinian people to exercise its right to self-

determination, including the right to create its independent State of Palestine. We therefore urge the parties concerned to engage in serious dialogue, settle their conflict and realize the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace, within secure and internationally borders.

The peoples of the Middle East, and in particular the Palestinian people, have long suffered. Like other peoples the world over, they have all earned the right to live in peace. The international community is duty-bound to do all it can to help the parties concerned to resolve their problems peacefully and as rapidly as possible. We believe that, through serious and sincere dialogue among the concerned parties, the question of Palestine can be resolved.

Ms. Davis (United Kingdom): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, Iceland, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

The European Union has welcomed the successful conclusion of the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank as a significant step towards implementing the road map. It has praised the positive steps by both sides, but emphasized that more remained to be done. The European Union calls for renewed action in parallel by both parties to fulfil their obligations under the road map and commitments made at Sharm el-Sheikh.

The European Union welcomes the Agreement on Movement and Access between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Those issues are fundamental to improving the humanitarian situation in Gaza and essential for promoting peaceful economic development. The Agreement signifies a major breakthrough. The priority now is to ensure that the commitments made in it are translated into reality. The European Union is prepared to undertake the third-party role proposed in the Agreement. It will monitor the operations of the Rafah border crossing point and provide assistance to reinforce Palestinian border-management capacities. The European Community is taking forward the necessary capacity-building through training, equipment and technical assistance to the Palestinian Authority.

The European Union welcomes the holding of multiparty elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council foreseen for January 2006. The European Union underlines that free and fair elections are an indispensable step in the process of consolidating democratic institutions. The European Union urges the Palestinian Authority to uphold all provisions of the electoral law. The Council urges Israel to cooperate fully with the Palestinian Authority in facilitating the preparation and conduct of the elections.

The European Union welcomes the Palestinian Authority's statements condemning violence and urging Palestinian groups that have engaged in terrorism to abandon that course and engage in the democratic process. Ultimately, those who want to be part of the political process should not engage in armed activities, as there is a fundamental contradiction between such activities and the building of a democratic State.

The European Union stands ready to assist the Palestinian Authority financially, technically and politically with the elections, in liaison with other members of the Quartet and the international community, to ensure that the electoral process is conducted in accordance with international principles for genuine democratic elections. To that end, the European Union is ready to send an observer mission.

The European Union is concerned by actions that could prejudge a final status agreement.

The European Union remains committed to the two-State solution as laid out in the road map and agreed between the parties, which would result in a viable, contiguous, sovereign and independent Palestinian State existing side by side in peace with an Israel living within recognized and secure borders.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 15.

I should like to inform members that action on draft resolutions A/60/L.28, A/60/L.29, A/60/L.30 and A/60/L.31 will be taken immediately after the debate on agenda item 14, "The situation in the Middle East".

Agenda item 14

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/60/258 and A/60/539)

Draft resolutions (A/60/L.32 and A/60/L.33)

The Acting President: I call on the representative of Egypt to introduce draft resolutions A/60/L.32 and A/60/L.33.

Mr. Adel (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are meeting today to discuss the question of the Middle East — a hotbed of tension where conflict has continued for decades as a result of the Israeli occupation of Arab territories. That occupation has led to instability and in security, not only in the Middle East, but throughout the world. The time has come to seriously address that problem on the basis of the values and principles enunciated in the outcome document (*resolution 60/1*) of the High-level Plenary Meeting that marked the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations. We should do so with the determination to bring about a just and lasting peace in all parts of the world, in accordance with the principles and purposes of the Charter. That is the only way to ensure security for all peoples, and to accord due priority to bringing about the comprehensive and just settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Every year the General Assembly discusses the item entitled "The situation in the Middle East" and adopts two particularly important draft resolutions on the item. One of them deals with the issue of Jerusalem. Beginning with resolution 181 (II) of 1947, successive General Assembly and Security Council resolutions have reiterated the need to preserve the special status of that city, declaring illegitimate all measures taken by successive Israeli Governments aimed at changing it before final-status negotiations take place between the Palestinian and Israeli parties.

The other draft resolution reaffirms the determination of the international community to put an end to the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and to deal with Israel's continued violation of Security Council resolution 497 (1981) until Israel completely withdraws from the Syrian Golan and until the speedy resumptions of political negotiations with a view to reaching a just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Arab peace initiative, which was adopted at the Beirut Arab Summit of 2002, reiterated that peace is the strategic option of the Arab countries, to be achieved within the framework of the strict implementation of the principle of land for peace and in accordance with international law. The Arab initiative also reiterated that an Israeli withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied in 1967 would open the door to the normalization of relations between Israel and all Arab countries and allow the entire Middle East region to live in peace and security. In spite of the tireless efforts of the Egyptian leadership to give impetus to the peace process with a view to implementing that initiative, Israel has rejected it and continues to take unilateral measures — measures that constitute major obstacles for the international community as it tries to move on to the next phase of the process.

We look forward to more active involvement by the major actors in the international community, including the United Nations, so as to give impetus to the peace process and to begin serious peace negotiations among all parties with a view to achieving the full withdrawal by Israel from all the occupied territories.

The unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and from some settlements in the West Bank shows that when there is political will, obligations — foremost among them the full withdrawal from all the occupied Palestinian territories — can be fulfilled. It is therefore important for the Quartet to intensify its efforts to urge Israel to complete the implementation of its obligations under the road map. Israel should also avoid policies and practices that are harmful to the peace process. It should demonstrate goodwill and begin to promote mutual trust with the Palestinian party, within a specific time frame, in order to lend momentum to the Arab initiative with a view to abiding by its obligation to withdraw.

The Syrian and Lebanese tracks are of particular importance. There must be a complete and comprehensive withdrawal from all Arab lands, including Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories. A just and comprehensive peace requires the immediate initiation of negotiations. Israel should therefore no longer refuse to participate in such negotiations, but should evince the courage necessary to reach both short- and long-term agreements.

I would like to introduce two draft resolutions under agenda item 14, "The situation in the Middle East": draft resolution A/60/L.33, entitled "Jerusalem", and draft resolution A/60/L.32, entitled "The Syrian Golan". Since the issuance of the draft resolutions, Iraq, Kenya, Kuwait, Namibia, South Africa and the

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have added their names to the list of sponsors of A/60/L.33; Iraq, Kenya, Kuwait, Namibia, South Africa and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have added their names to the list of sponsors of A/60/L.32.

Draft resolution (A/60/L.33), on Jerusalem, recalls relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions regarding the special status of Jerusalem — resolutions that have declared as null and void all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, aimed at altering the status and character of Jerusalem.

The draft resolution also recalls the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, and stresses that any comprehensive and just solution to the issue of Jerusalem should take into account the legitimate concerns of both the Palestinian and Israeli sides and should include internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure the freedom of religion and of conscience of all inhabitants.

Draft resolution A/60/L.32, entitled "The Syrian Golan", recalls Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and expresses concern with regard to Israel's failure to comply with the provisions of the resolution. It also reaffirms the applicability of the Hague Convention of 1907 and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 to the Syrian territory occupied by Israel since 1967, and again calls upon Israel to withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967, to resume discussions on both the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and to respect its commitments under previous agreements.

The time has come for the international community to undertake a comprehensive review of the situation in the Middle East. The peoples of the region aspire to stability, lasting peace and development. That can be achieved only with collective international will to give impetus to the resumption of direct peace negotiations on the basis of international law, including Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, and in accordance with the practical approach set out in the road map.

Ms. Davis (United Kingdom): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, Iceland, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this message.

The European Union remains committed to the two-State solution as laid out in the road map and agreed between the parties, which would result in a viable, contiguous, sovereign and independent Palestinian State existing side by side in peace with Israel and living within recognized and secure borders.

The European Union welcomed the successful conclusion of the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the northern West Bank as a significant step towards implementing the road map. It praised the positive steps on both sides but emphasized that more remained to be done.

The European Union welcomes the Agreement on Movement and Access between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Those issues are fundamental to improving the humanitarian situation in Gaza and essential for promoting peaceful economic development. The Agreement signifies a major breakthrough. The priority now is to ensure that the commitments thus made are translated into reality.

The European Union welcomes the holding of multiparty elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council, foreseen for 25 January 2006. The European Union underlines that free and fair elections are an indispensable step in the process of consolidating democratic institutions. The European Union stands ready to assist the Palestinian Authority financially, technically and politically with the elections, in liaison with other members of the Quartet and the international community, to ensure that the electoral process is conducted in accordance with international principles for genuine democratic elections. To that end, the European Union is ready to send an observer mission. The European Union urges the Palestinian Authority to uphold all provisions of the electoral law. The Council urges Israel to cooperate fully with the Palestinian Authority in facilitating the preparation and conduct of the elections.

Finally, the European Union will work with Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the international community to contribute to realizing the aspirations of the Palestinian people and achieving a two-State solution, with both Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders. We wish to stress that both parties can count on the undiminished support of the European Union on the

path towards a durable, peaceful and just settlement of the conflict. We are convinced that that goal can be achieved for both Israelis and Palestinians. Moreover, we are convinced that it will contribute to peace in the region.

Mr. Mohd. Radzi (Malaysia): It is regrettable that the Middle East region continues to experience the damaging consequences of war, conflict and foreign occupation. Indeed, the situation in the region is at a delicate crossroads. The question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict remains at the core of the regional tensions and peace and security concerns in the Middle East.

The situation in the region has been compounded by the developments in Iraq and the disastrous threats posed by terrorists, as we have recently witnessed in Jordan. Israel's continued possession of a substantial arsenal of weapons of mass destruction — including nuclear weapons — constitutes another dangerous dimension to the instability in the region and threatens the future of all its peoples. Therefore, the establishment of the Middle East as a zone free of weapons of mass destruction must be pursued in earnest.

The current situation and stark realities in the region demand greater attention and support from the international community in order to assist countries in the region in pursuing the various initiatives toward achieving peace, security and stability. The Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 has clearly pronounced peace as an indisputable strategic option of the Arab States. It is testimony to their commitment to establish peace with Israel based on justice, the restoration of rights and good-neighbourly relations, rather than on continued aggression or the violation of their national sovereignty. The solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict continues to depend on ending the Israeli occupation of all Arab territories.

At this critical juncture, the international community, in particular the Quartet, must redouble their efforts and involvement in order to implement the road map and to create an environment that would guarantee the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We must do all we possibly can and seek to ensure that the current momentum towards peace is maintained. It is incumbent on both Israel and Palestine to implement the road map, and it is equally incumbent upon the Quartet to ensure that that objective is achieved without delay. We support the Palestinian people in their struggle for self-determination and for the establishment of an independent and sovereign State on their national soil on the basis of the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings.

My delegation hopes that the Palestinian Legislative Council elections on 25 January 2006 will be another milestone in Palestinian efforts to put their political life back on track. A successful outcome of the elections would enable the Palestinian leadership to carry the peace process forward. Hence, it will be in the interest of the occupying Power to introduce and implement all necessary measures to guarantee the achievement of that objective, including by removing the restrictions imposed in the occupied Palestinian territories to allow all Palestinian voters, including those in East Jerusalem, to participate in the elections. It is also the responsibility of the international community to assist the Palestinian Authority, as in the past, to conduct free and fair elections.

The lack of progress on the Israeli-Syrian front is of great concern to all of us. Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan for more than 37 years remains a serious violation of international law, shows disrespect for the principle of the inadmissibility of the conquest of land by force and circumvents resolutions of international legitimacy and the peace process that began in Madrid in 1991.

Direct negotiations among the parties are indispensable in the pursuit of a final settlement of the conflict. Negotiations should be without preconditions and based on the terms of reference of the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. It is regrettable that Israel has, on several occasions, rejected serious offers presented by Syria for the resumption of negotiations. My delegation remains hopeful that Israel will respond positively to the offer by Syria in that regard. We remain firm in our conviction that peace between both sides can be achieved only through Israel's full withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan.

My delegation welcomes the decision by the Syrian Arab Republic to allow the United Nations International Independent Investigation Commission to

question its senior officials over the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. We have strongly condemned the assassination and reiterate our call for the perpetrators of that heinous act to be brought to justice. We are confident that Syria will fully cooperate with the Commission, as it has demonstrated, and that it will seek to resolve the issue in a diplomatic manner and avoid circumstances that could possibly destabilize both Syria and Lebanon. We are also confident that the Commission will endeavour to expedite its work with utmost impartiality and proceed directly to investigate all relevant aspects and interrogate all those concerned.

Given Malaysia's excellent relations with both Lebanon and Syria and our faith in the Organization, we are eager to discover the truth and look forward to the amicable closure of this issue as soon as possible. We urge all parties to allow the United Nations International Independent Investigation Commission to conduct its work in accordance with its mandate and terms of reference.

The situation in Iraq has serious implications for international and regional peace and security. Restoring peace and security expeditiously in Iraq is critical. The Iraqi leadership has the right — and indeed the duty — to maintain law and order throughout its territory, to achieve the desired political stability and to restore normalcy in Iraq.

The security of Iraq must be the sole responsibility of an independent and sovereign Iraq. In that regard, there is a need for a comprehensive approach, which should incorporate security, governance, economic revitalization, justice and the rule of law in order to achieve true independence and democracy, peace and security. We hope that the new Iraqi Government, which will be formed following the elections on 15 December 2005, will be in a position to set the best course for Iraq and its people. There is also an urgent need for the Iraqi leadership to redouble its efforts — difficult as they may be — to prevail over all perpetrators of acts of violence in the country's territory, be they Iraqis or non-Iraqis, on the basis of applicable national and international law.

The United Nations has the best credentials to assist Iraq in its political process as well as to create the right conditions to enable Member States to take part in peacebuilding and reconstruction in Iraq. If the international community collectively succeeds in helping Iraq to seize the moment, we will, at the same time, succeed in bringing to an end the bitter divisions caused by earlier actions related to this question. The war has been won, but we must make sure that we can win the peace. Let us work together to ensure that we do not disappoint the Iraqi people.

We must move forward and look at the Middle East in a comprehensive manner. The peoples of the region deserve permanent peace, stability and development, and we, the States Members of the Organization, must continue to offer our support. That can be accomplished by pursuing the vision of a definitive solution based on the resolutions of international legitimacy, the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and the road map.

There is a glimmer of hope. We must work collectively to transform that glimmer into a bright shining light of peace, freedom and dignity for all affected peoples in the region. We call on those who have the most influence to work seriously towards the establishment of enduring peace and security in the Middle East. We urge Israel to act in its own best interests by looking beyond its immediate security needs — important as they may be — and by beginning in earnest to engage its Arab neighbours in serious and meaningful dialogue towards the early realization of a comprehensive peace.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): The international community is in agreement that the question of Palestine lies at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict and that it has a direct and strong impact on the situation in the Middle East as a whole. In fact, the just resolution of the question of Palestine is the key to achieving a comprehensive and lasting peace in the region.

However, the situation in the Middle East has other important aspects, which are sources of great concern to the international community. In the statement we made at the 57th meeting, held yesterday, under this agenda item, "Question of Palestine", our Minister for Foreign Affairs highlighted some of those issues. Therefore, I will not repeat the points that have already been articulated.

Today, I should like to highlight specific aspects of the question of Palestine. In our statement yesterday, we spoke about the catastrophic consequences of Israel's illegal policies and practices, particularly those

aimed at seizing and colonizing further Palestinian land through Israel's unlawful construction of the wall and the expansion of its network of illegal colonial settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

While those illegal policies and measures continue to harm the people and the land of Palestine, Israel's expansionist designs continue to have increasingly devastating consequences for East Jerusalem which is at the heart of the question of Palestine. At the same time, it holds central importance for the Arab region and for the Islamic and Christian worlds in general. Reaching reasonable solution to the question of Jerusalem that is based on international legitimacy is therefore a prerequisite for resolving the question of Palestine in all its aspects and for establishing peace and stability in the region as a whole.

Despite countless United Nations resolutions and repeated calls by the international community, the occupying Power has embarked on a crusade of relentless colonization in East Jerusalem. Since 1967, Israel has systematically sought to change the legal status, demographic composition and character of occupied East Jerusalem by implementing a comprehensive and integrated policy aimed at the artificial creation of a Jewish majority in the city through the confiscation of Palestinian land, the intensification of settlement construction, the transfer of settlers into the city and, most recently, the construction of the wall. At the same time, the policy has sought to decrease the presence of Palestinians in Jerusalem by making every aspect of life increasingly harsh for them in every way possible.

In essence, those dangerous measures carried out by the occupying Power will effectively isolate the city from the West Bank by encircling East Jerusalem with its illegal settlements and its unlawful wall, jeopardizing the possibility of territorial contiguity of the city with the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory and thereby undermining the Palestinian position in any future negotiations regarding East Jerusalem. It has become perfectly clear that, as the Israeli historian Mr. Tom Segev has stated, "what is happening today in Jerusalem goes beyond security needs and reflects the essence of the original Zionist dream: maximum territory, minimum Arabs."

It must be reiterated that all of the aforementioned actions by Israel have been committed in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and the Hague Regulations of 1907 and in blatant defiance of relevant Security Council resolutions. In 27 of those resolutions, the Security Council affirmed the applicability of the Convention to all the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, and repeatedly declared that all of the measures taken and arrangements made by Israel, aimed at changing the legal status of the city, are null and void and without any legal validity whatsoever. On its part, the Palestinian side has reaffirmed that it will not accept the annulment of Palestinian and Arab rights in East Jerusalem and, despite all illegal Israeli actions intended to create a fait accompli in the city, affirms the right of the Palestinian people to the independent State of Palestine.

On the issue of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, we continue to affirm the need to establish a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. In that regard, Israel's insistence on possessing nuclear capabilities and its refusal to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to place its nuclear facilities under the safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency place the entire region in great danger. Its stance will undoubtedly lead to further complications in that sensitive area, including the possibility of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction of all types in the region. It must be reiterated that peace cannot be achieved through military might and will never flourish under the mentality of deterrence and military superiority.

It has always been our conviction that, in order to reach a solution to the decades of injustice and suffering experienced by the peoples of the Middle East, we must revert to the basics — a return to the rule of law and respect for human rights and international law. No country should be allowed to act, as Israel does, as if it were above the law. The international community must not allow Israel to continue to deny the rights of the Palestinian people and must compel it to comply with the principles set out in the United Nations Charter and international law. Absent that, peace and prosperity for all the peoples in the Middle East will continue to be but a distant hope.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): Israel did not take part in yesterday's annual ritual of turning 29 November into a

Palestinian festival. We very much regret the fact that some of our neighbours have hijacked a date that marks a historic decision by this Assembly to which they themselves objected. We feel it is tragic that dwelling on a distorted past overshadows our hopes for a brighter future. It would be unforgivable if, for our neighbours, there were no present and no future — only the past happening over and over and over again.

Israel feels that the dramatic and positive developments on the ground — as only recently manifested by our disengagement from Gaza, the Rafah crossing agreement, and the upcoming Palestinian harvest — merit a fresh and bold look forward in hope rather than a bleak look back in anger, and feels that that reality should also be reflected in this Hall.

We call upon our neighbours, and especially the Palestinians, to join us in making the tough neighbourhood we live in a better place for our children and grandchildren. My delegation will make every effort to create a new atmosphere, which must also be reflected in this building and in this Hall, and calls upon our partners to work together with us to that end.

Mr. Hassan (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): This year, a number of interesting developments have reinvigorated the political process. We welcome Israel's withdrawal from settlements in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Israel and the Palestinians have also yet to honour some of the commitments they have undertaken under the road map and the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings. Israel must continue to withdraw from all the occupied Palestinian territories, beginning with a withdrawal to the borders of 28 September 2000, cease its settlement activities and halt construction of the separation wall, which has caused great harm to thousands of Palestinians in the occupied territories.

The Palestinians must continue to take every possible step to preserve the calm and to prevent violence. We welcome the Palestinian Authority's commitment to containing violence and maintaining security and stability. We are especially gratified by the steps taken by Mr. Mahmoud Abbas to honour his commitment to pursuing reform within the Palestinian National Authority. We believe that the Palestinian commitment to reforming the Authority, and the security services in particular, should enjoy the support of the international community, and especially of the Quartet, thus enabling the Palestinians to meet all their obligations at this important stage in the preparations for democratic elections.

The responsibility for halting violence is incumbent not on one party alone, but on both. We condemn the assassination of civilians, whoever they may be, and urge Israel to honour the ceasefire, to stop its attacks on Palestinians, to rescind restrictions on Palestinian movement, and to end all violations of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Palestinian people.

Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and from some settlements in the northern West Bank, in accordance with the road map, represents a genuine opportunity for activating the peace process. The agreement between the two parties on the border crossing with Egypt will contribute to the peace process. We hope that the two parties, with the Quartet's support and supervision, will reach agreement on all matters related to the withdrawal from Gaza in order to improve the living conditions of the Palestinians and the political situation. In spite of Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and the dismantling of some settlements in the northern West Bank, it is difficult to understand how the peace process can move forward as long as Israeli settlements remain, especially in areas critical to the final status negotiations, such as Jerusalem.

Carrying out a partial withdrawal while at the same time continuing to expand settlements elsewhere is a contradictory stance that will not solve the crisis nor contribute to finding a lasting peace between the two parties. Thus, Israel must quickly withdraw from the West Bank, as it did from the Gaza Strip, to the 4 June 1967 borders.

Israel's continued construction of the separation wall, in disregard of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, constitutes a flagrant violation of the resolutions of international legitimacy, in particular General Assembly resolution ES-10/15. The International Court of Justice's advisory opinion on the separation wall must be respected. The Court's advisory opinion determined that the Israeli settlements constitute a violation of international humanitarian law, that there is no legal basis for the wall's construction, that Israel should dismantle the completed sections of the wall and cease any further construction, that confiscated land should be returned to its former owners and that compensation should be paid to

persons harmed by the wall's construction. The Court's advisory opinion holds that the construction of the wall could create facts on the ground tantamount to the actual annexation of occupied Palestinian territory.

Arbitrary Israeli practices and the construction of the wall which have resulted in the deterioration of the situation in Palestinian territory and have had negative repercussions in the region, especially in Jordan, must cease. Stability and security cannot be achieved unless the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories is brought to an end, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the Arab peace initiative, a negotiated settlement in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), the fulfilment of all commitments, and consideration of the fact that the withdrawal from Gaza is part of the framework of the road map and the creation of two States.

Mr. Maurer (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): The major developments that have taken place over the past year make it possible to look to the future with prudent optimism. Aside from its political significance, the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and part of the northern West Bank demonstrates to a certain extent the capacity of the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to work together. The agreements that followed — the agreement with Egypt on border controls and the agreement reached two weeks ago on Rafah and other crossing points — are to be welcomed.

Looking beyond the removal of civil and military infrastructures in the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank, the real success of the disengagement will be measured by two crucial criteria.

The first is the stabilization of the Gaza Strip, which presents exceptional challenges with respect to human security. Public services there are no longer adequate given the increased demand of a constantly growing population. Unemployment and poverty rates are very high. And humanitarian aid needs remain considerable. We have a shared responsibility to work to improve the political, security and humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, in particular by ensuring the access of goods and persons. We particularly appreciate the efforts of the Quartet and the personal engagement of its Special Envoy, Mr. James Wolfensohn, in that regard.

The second crucial factor is the relaunching of a genuine political process. All efforts made by the international community to stimulate economic and social recovery in the occupied Palestinian territory will be effective and lasting only if they are supported by a political process of the same scale. The only way to reach a solution to the conflict is through negotiation. The objective is the realization of, on the one hand, Israel's right to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders and, on the other, the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and the establishment of a viable Palestinian State. Solutions need to be found to the issues of borders, Jerusalem and Palestinian refugees. That will require both sides to make substantial concessions.

A peace proposal must have substantial popular support if it is to have a chance of success. Thus, civil society must be involved in the process, and public opinion must be prepared for peace. For the populations concerned to embark on that path, they must feel that there are real and tangible prospects for the improvement of their present situation. Fruitful negotiations require an atmosphere of hope and confidence, a clear political perspective and an absence of violence and arbitrary actions.

While awaiting the resumption of political dialogue, the two parties must respect and implement their respective obligations and commitments. First, they must respect international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, and human rights law, which constitute the applicable legal framework. Of equal importance is the obligation to avoid taking measures that could prejudge the outcome of the final status negotiations.

The two parties have long known their respective obligations. Fulfilling those obligations is the only reasonable and essential option leading to the re-establishment of confidence and constructive dialogue. We call upon the international community, in particular the Quartet, to commit itself to implementation of the road map and the monitoring of compliance by the two parties.

Priority must be given to respect for, and the maintenance of, territorial unity between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Switzerland calls on the Israeli Government to freeze all settlement activities, which are a matter of great

concern. We observe with concern the division of the territory of the West Bank as a result of the construction of the barrier, continued settlement expansion and the increasing isolation of East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. The creation of irreversible facts on the ground seriously undermines all chances of achieving a lasting, negotiated peace and can only lead to an exacerbation of the humanitarian crisis and the political, economic and social fragmentation of the Palestinian population.

Likewise, Switzerland calls on the Palestinian Authority to work with greater determination to dismantle terrorist infrastructures. The Palestinian Authority must also ensure the security of all its citizens. In addition, respect for human rights and the implementation of the principles of good governance should be among its priorities.

The only alternative to peace is further violence and destruction. The year 2006 will be critical for elections in Israel and in the occupied Palestinian territory. One can only hope for the emergence of a new trend favouring the resumption of the political process, leading to the attainment of the objective set by the entire international community: two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): Yesterday, 29 November 2005, marked the fifty-eighth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947. That date would eventually be observed as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Therefore, it is particularly painful to note that 38 years have passed since Israel first occupied Arab territories. Israel, the occupying Power, has steadfastly refused to comply with the collective will of the international community by withdrawing its military forces to its own territory and thus putting an end to its occupation of Arab territories.

Those years have been fraught with painful memories and distress for those who have suffered under Israeli occupation, particularly since they have passed without the attainment of the ultimate objective, peace. That is a major source of concern for those who aspire to the realization of a just peace, who feel desperate and who fear that their hopes and dreams might come to naught and that their noble efforts might not achieve the desired objective because of manoeuvring, prevarication, procrastination and failure to abide by commitments under conventions, resolutions and other international instruments.

Undoubtedly, overcoming the current impasse in the peace process in the Middle East requires intensified and concerted international efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement that will enhance peace in the region through the implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions — particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as other resolutions.

We believe that the road map might be the best way to attain the objectives of United Nations resolutions concerning the occupied Palestinian territories. Thus far, as noted in the report of the Secretary-General (A/60/539), Israel has failed to carry out its basic obligations under the road map, including the freezing of all settlement activity, the immediate dismantling of settlement outposts and the ending of the construction of the separation wall. The Secretary-General believes that work on the wall is a unilateral act not in keeping with the road map and that it, along with continued Israeli settlement activity, constitutes a key challenge to the fulfilment of the road map's goal of a two-State solution.

Clearly, the two main obstacles to the peace process are the construction and continued extension of the wall, which run counter to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004. The opinion called for the dismantlement of the wall and for an end to the continued expansion of the settlements and to the construction of further settlements in the West Bank and in the occupied Arab Syrian Golan.

The Security Council has called those actions, the building and expansion of settlements, a policy and practice of Israel, and has condemned them repeatedly, particularly in its resolution 446 (1979) of 22 March 1979, which stated that such actions have no legal validity and constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. The Council has also strongly denounced Israel's failure to implement resolutions 237 (1967) of 14 June 1967, 252 (1968) of 21 May 1968 and 298 (1971) of 25 September 1971. Moreover, it has denounced Israel's failure to implement relevant General Assembly resolutions, including resolutions 2253 (ES-V) of 4 July 1967, 2254 (ES-V) of 14 July

1967, 32/5 of 28 October 1977 and 33/113 of 18 December 1978.

It is regrettable that Israel, the occupying Power, has continued to implement its plans to change the character of the occupied Arab territories, in total disregard of international law, international humanitarian law and international conventions applicable to all occupied territories, such as the Fourth Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and the Hague Convention of 14 May 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

It was reported in document A/60/271 that Israel has embarked upon major changes in Jerusalem. Those changes, which can be described as radical, undermine the city's Arab character and strengthen its Jewish character. They totally contradict United Nations resolutions such as Security Council resolution 478 (1980), which declared all such legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel in Jerusalem to be null and void.

With regard to the occupied Syrian Golan, document A/60/65 states that the Israeli authorities have authorized the construction of nine new settlements and expanded 44 existing settlements. Such actions provide irrefutable proof that it is Israel's intention to entrench its occupation of the Syrian Golan and to refuse to implement relevant international resolutions, including Security Council resolution 497 (1981) of 17 December 1981, which considered Israel's decision to impose its laws, administration and jurisprudence on the occupied Syrian Golan to be null and void and without any legal validity whatsoever.

Not only the occupied Palestinian territories and the occupied Syrian Golan, but also the Shaba'a farms, are still under Israeli occupation.

In spite of the Middle East's vital historical, geographical and economic importance, it has not enjoyed stability for many decades, owing to the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories — an occupation that has depleted the resources, capacities and capabilities of the Arab States and their peoples. Stability will not return to the Middle East as long as the Israeli Government continues to adopt repressive policies and practices. Many years of such practices have led to the deterioration of the situation in the occupied territories, harming the people of the region and giving rise to successive crises. Israel has resorted to excessive force in order to impose security, to expand existing settlements and to build new ones in order to entrench its occupation and create a new fait accompli.

The Kingdom of Bahrain reiterates its full support for the Palestinian people in their struggle to attain their full, legitimate political rights, including the right to establish their own independent State with the holy city of Jerusalem as its capital. We demand that Israel implement its legal obligations in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978) 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the principle of land for peace and the road map.

We demand that Israel withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 and implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 497 (1981). Israel's continued occupation of the Syrian Golan represents a serious obstacle to the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and undermines international efforts to bring security to that vital region of the world.

We would also like to reiterate the importance of Israel's putting an end to its occupation of the remaining Lebanese territories, in accordance with resolution 425 (1978), to cease its targeting of Lebanese territories and to show respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): Despite the fact that the era of colonization and foreign occupation has come to an end and that the age of the enforcement of international law and the principles of the Charter has begun, with peoples gaining their national independence and exercising their legitimate right to self-determination, the Middle East region remains the one region of the world where people suffer under Israeli occupation. Israel has continued to occupy Palestinian and Arab territories since 1967 and to pursue its illegal settlement schemes, which constitute a blatant violation of 40 Security Council and more than 600 General Assembly resolutions, adopted over the past 58 years.

We consider the international community's failure to end the illegal Israeli policies in the Arab territories for all these years to be the main reason that Israel has been able to continue to violate international law, including by confiscating land and natural resources and enforcing laws and regulations that impose its legal and administrative jurisdiction over Arab and

Palestinian territories, especially in Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan. Such measures, which have prevented indigenous Arab peoples from exercising their basic human rights, are aimed at changing the geographical and historical nature of those territories and replacing their Arab populations with Jewish settlers.

The United Arab Emirates has paid close attention to the reports of the Secretary-General, which contain important information clearly informing the international community about the dangerous policies carried out by the Israeli Government in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories.

We are concerned about Israel's confiscation of more than 78 per cent of historical Palestinian territories and its refusal to withdraw from the remaining Palestinian territories, in particular East Jerusalem, where people are prevented from living and travel restrictions are imposed. The United Arab Emirates is further alarmed by the fact that Israel has confiscated 96 per cent of the Syrian Golan Heights and undermined living conditions there by laying siege to its villages, destroying the infrastructure, uprooting trees, setting forests on fire, moving earth, burying chemical and nuclear waste and stealing water.

Israel is continuing to lay siege to the Syrian occupants of the Golan. It prevents them from visiting their land; it detains and forcibly arrests them; it deprives them of basic medical and educational services; it distorts all of the facts relating to the geography and history of the Golan, with a view to obliterating any sense of Arab national belonging. And it deprives Syrian children of their history, heritage, culture and homeland.

While we strongly condemn such illegal Israeli practices, which make clear Israel's true intentions of rejecting peace, we emphasize once again that the achievement of an immediate, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the establishment of security and stability in the region requires, now more than ever, effective and urgent international action in order to ensure the full and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories. To that end, a number of steps must be taken.

First, a mechanism must be developed to monitor Israel's compliance with its legal obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, which is applicable to the occupied Arab and Palestinian territories, and to ensure that it abides by the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, issued on 7 July of last year, which called upon Israel to remove the separation wall that it has built in the West Bank and Jerusalem, as it is illegal and is having a harmful effect on the livelihoods of the Palestinian people and will prevent them from establishing an independent State.

Secondly, the international community must underline once again, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 478 (1980) and 497 (1981), the illegality and the invalidity of all legal, administrative and judicial measures imposed by Israel on Jerusalem, as well as the transfer by some countries of their diplomatic missions to Jerusalem and the alteration of the structural, demographic, and legal status of the occupied Golan.

Thirdly, the Quartet must be urged to take serious steps to secure Israel's commitment to resuming negotiations and its strict implementation of the road map's requirements, including the creation of a Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders according to a specific timetable. In that context, we stress the importance of expanding the road map process to include the Lebanese and Syrian peace tracks and the importance of ending all illegal activities carried out by Israel in those territories.

Fourthly, Israel must end its air, land and sea violations of Lebanese sovereignty and must cooperate by sharing all maps of the landmines that Israel planted in southern Lebanon before withdrawing. Israel must also respect the inalienable rights of Lebanon, including its right to adopt its own national decisions and its right to control its territorial waters in accordance with international law.

In conclusion, we affirm that the Arab-Israeli conflict can be settled, and security and stability can prevail in the region only through the restitution of all Arab territories and rights, in accordance with the road map, the terms of reference of the Madrid Peace Conference and the Arab peace initiative adopted at the Beirut summit.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Middle East region is witnessing important, radical developments and events aimed at altering the political, cultural and demographic character of the region and redrawing its borders. Some believe that those events better suit the region's new

functions and tasks in the service of the strategic interests of certain foreign forces, principally Israel.

With such feverish restructuring of the region that is contrary to the aspirations of the region's peoples and is based on concepts that must be denounced, such as the theory of constructive chaos, the Middle East is embarking on a new, grave stage of its history, characterized by insecurity, the spread of terrorism, destructive chaos and instability. That political environment has cast a long shadow over all aspects of life and has hindered the exploitation of the promising opportunities that had arisen. Instead, it has led to further complications and tension in a region that requires the intensive efforts of the international community, in particular the United Nations, in order to achieve a comprehensive and just peace and help the region achieve development and progress.

For centuries, the Middle East has been the region of the world most subjected to foreign threats, unjust attacks, assaults on the truth and the use of force against its peoples. All of that has prevented the peoples of the Middle East from realizing their aspirations for freedom and progress. Continued Israeli occupation of Palestine and the Syrian Golan since June of 1967 poses a flagrant challenge to international law. The occupation is in flagrant disregard of the principle of the inadmissibility of acquisition of land by force and flouts the resolutions of international legitimacy and the peace process begun at the 1991 Madrid Conference. That process has been rendered completely inoperative by successive Israeli Governments, especially the present one, which rejects the framework for peace and pursues its policies of killing, assassinations, State-sponsored terrorism and destruction. Israeli aggression and the occupation of Arab territories threatens peace and security not only in the Middle East but also in the entire world.

Since its occupation of the Syrian Arab Golan in 1967, Israel has used all means at its disposal to change the status of the land and the character of its people, including their sense of belonging. It has used force to expel the inhabitants from their land and from their towns, villages and farms. It has used all means available to found settlements, bringing settlers from all over the world, to the detriment of the inhabitants of the Syrian Golan, who have been deprived of their basic freedoms and their human rights.

Since 1967, some 500,000 Syrians have been forcefully expelled from their villages and cities by Israel. All women, children and elderly people who have been expelled look forward to the day when their land is liberated and they can return to their villages and towns and exercise their rights under international law and United Nations resolutions. Israel is mistaken if it believes that the settlers, the settlements and its annexation laws can ensure Israel's complete control over the Golan. Israel knows very well that, sooner or later, it will have to remove those settlers and demolish the settlements.

Israel has also attempted to annex the Golan and impose its laws and its legal and administrative jurisdiction on that territory. It has practised every form of racial discrimination and exerted pressure and intimidation in order to impose its Israeli identity on the population. In spite of the rejection by the international community and the Security Council of the annexation and the judgement of the international community that such an annexation is null and void and has no legal validity, in accordance with Security Council resolution 497 (1981), Israel still refuses to comply with this resolution and continues its occupation of the Golan, in violation of the rights of the area's inhabitants and in total disregard of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

In this regard and in violation of its legal obligations under international law, Israel has, over the years, built 44 settlements in the Golan and seeks to increase the number of settlers located there to 150,000 within the next two years. Thus, Israel's talk about peace is meant to deceive the international community; it constitutes a challenge to and distortion of the will and the resolutions of the international community.

The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories has prepared a list of the violations committed by an undeterred Israel in the Syrian Golan, including Israel's ongoing detention and imprisonment of numerous Arab Syrian citizens. The list also includes Israel's burial of nuclear waste in the Golan, its control of the Golan's water resources and its denial of those water resources to Syrian Arab citizens.

Israel, the occupying Power, imposes unjust taxes on the Syrian Arabs and charges very high fees for care at medical centres in the Golan. The Israeli army's emplacement of numerous landmines near many Syrian villages and towns has caused great suffering among Syrians in the occupied Golan. These mines are responsible for a large number of deaths, injuries and permanent disabilities.

This is all well known to international public opinion. We call for immediate intervention to put an end to this murderous Israeli mine machine. As proof of Israel's violations of the most basic human rights, I should like to note the statement made a few days ago by the families of Syrian Arab prisoners and detainees from the occupied Golan. In this statement, they called upon international public opinion and on all human rights and international legal organizations to work seriously and tirelessly to put an end to all of these Israeli violations against the population.

The statement recalled that more than 21 years had passed since a number of young people from the Golan were detained without being charged with any crime except that of defending the dignity and the freedom of their people. It also noted intentional medical negligence and failure by the Israeli authorities to provide necessary medical care and nourishment, as well as the commission of violations against detainees, such as beatings, repression and deprivation of books and visits. The statement also refers to a grave deterioration in the health of Sitan Nimr al-Wali and Sidqi Suleiman al-Maqt and his brother, Bishr Suleiman al-Maqt, as well as Cassim Muhammad al-Wali and the prisoner We'am Mahmoud 'Ammasha. It provides information testifying to the fact that the martyr Hayil Abu Zeid died of cancer while in Israeli detention.

Israel's possession of a huge arsenal of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons represents yet another immense threat to the Middle East. These weapons constitute another element of instability in the Middle East and a threat to the future of its peoples. At a time when all countries of the region without exception have acceded to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Israel remains alone in not having joined that agreement.

On the other hand, Syria and all other brotherly Arab countries were among the first to call for declaring the Middle East a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, and we have worked hard for the realization of that objective, including through the submission of a draft resolution to the Security Council in late 2003. Regrettably, the Security Council, for reasons that are well known, has to date been unable to adopt the draft resolution — in spite of all the hullabaloo we hear about the need to put an end to peaceful nuclear programmes conducted by other parties. Why should Israel be the exception?

Syria has repeatedly declared its full commitment to a just and comprehensive peace. It has always demanded Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab territory occupied since 1967. It has demanded that the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people be guaranteed, including its right to build its own independent State on its own land, with Jerusalem as its capital, based on the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative. It has also demanded Israel's withdrawal from the Lebanese Sheba'a farms.

Syria would like to reiterate that General Assembly agenda items relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict are and will continue to be no less valid than ever. We do not accept the logic, promoted by a few, according to which these items should be reviewed and some of them dropped, particularly since Israel continues to occupy Arab territories. The problem is not with United Nations resolutions, but rather with Israel's refusal to implement them, because it is not being pressured to do so. As long as Israel refuses to resume the peace talks within the framework of the Middle East peace process, we believe that no such review should take place. It is the duty of all States to pressure Israel to put an end to its occupation of Arab territories and to halt its practices that are condemned by the United Nations, rather than calling, most regrettably, for the deletion of items regarding the question of Palestine and the Middle East.

Syria's position has always been characterized by firmness, credibility and a commitment to peace and its framework. We look to the Member States of the United Nations to show real support and to respond to the implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions in a way that leads to a full Israeli withdrawal from the Lebanese Sheba'a farms, the Golan and the occupied Palestinian territories to the line of 4 June 1967. While we renew our commitment to international legitimacy and its resolutions, we call for the implementation of all resolutions, without

discrimination or selectivity among the parties. Scores of resolutions have been adopted by the Security Council; they should all be implemented in accordance with Article 25 of the Charter of the United Nations.

It is worth mentioning that when the United Nations or the international community are mentioned, many Arab citizens wonder why some resolutions are implemented and others are not. That is indeed the question.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): I should like to preface my statement by saying how delighted my delegation is to have this opportunity, through our consideration of this agenda item, to examine the situation in the Middle East, that seething cauldron which, every day, makes one fear the worst. Because it poses a real threat to international peace and security, the question of the Middle East deserves special attention. It is more than a mere concern. It is, above all, a responsibility incumbent upon the entire international community. The constant image we have of this part of the world is that of a region beset by violence, destitution and a constant lack of security.

Thus, in Iraq, foreign occupation has merely exacerbated the dire situation and lack of security. The establishment of a Government of national unity following the pluralist elections of last January and the trial of former Baath Party leaders will certainly not restore confidence there any time soon. Proof of this is the upsurge in acts of violence, sometimes barbaric in nature, which could long doom this country to instability, the consequences of which could be catastrophic for the entire region.

On this question, Burkina Faso believes that there is a need to speed up the assumption of power by the Iraqis themselves, and a need once again to place the United Nations at the centre of any initiative that would support the peacebuilding actions of the Government. Furthermore, we assert the Iraqi people's right to have exclusive control over their natural resources.

The outlook is similar with regard to other countries in the Middle East. In Lebanon, despite the withdrawal of Syrian troops and the organization of free and transparent elections facilitating the establishment of a new Government, the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was a stark demonstration to the world that that country is not yet close to emerging from this period of turbulence. Burkina Faso welcomes the establishment of the International Independent Investigation Commission authorized by the Security Council, and hopes that this murky business will be thoroughly clarified.

Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt have not been spared either, having experienced a wave of attacks. That is why we believe it important to encourage any initiative or solution that might address the situation, such as the recent consultations organized by Egypt, which my country sincerely welcomes. Clearly, given this climate of ongoing tension, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has also been affected, and has indeed given rise to acts of violence in the Middle East.

In the West Bank, Palestinians are continuing to suffer as a result of serious violations of their inalienable rights leading to the massive displacement of the population and the establishment of numerous refugee camps in the occupied territories and in neighbouring countries. Likewise, we cannot ignore the arbitrary arrests, the targeted assassinations of Palestinian leaders and, of course, the building — notwithstanding the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice — of the separation wall.

The death of President Yasser Arafat left a great vacuum. Fortunately, it was soon filled by his worthy successor, Mahmoud Abbas, as head of the Palestinian Authority. At his prompting, positive initiatives have been taken, in particular the suspension of the intifada and robust action against acts of terrorism, which have definitely helped to establish the beginnings of a direct dialogue with Israel.

There can be no doubt that the new sense of calm prompted the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip and the dismantlement of Jewish settlements. The Government of Burkina Faso welcomes that withdrawal, which shows that there is still hope. We call upon the belligerent parties to work further to defuse the situation.

For my country, working to defuse the situation will require constructive dialogue between the parties on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions — resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). We urge them to commit firmly and without further ado to that approach, even if, unfortunately, we have to admit that the many efforts made by the international community, embodied in specific proposals such as the road map, have not always produced the hoped-for results.

It goes without saying that Burkina Faso unreservedly supports Security Council resolution 1397 (2002), which advocates the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel within secure, internationally recognized borders.

Accordingly, we welcome the statement made by the Prime Minister of Israel in this Hall on the occasion of the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations (*see A/60/PV.5*), in which he clearly recognized that Palestinians have the right to a free, independent State.

The appeal made by the Quartet, meeting in September on the margins of the world summit, must be heeded by both belligerent parties so that the negotiating process can be relaunched with a view to implementing the road map. This opportunity must be seized. It is time for the protagonists to see reason and bury the hatchet once and for all so that both the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples — whose future is truly at stake — may finally coexist in peace and security.

Mrs. Juul (Norway): The world is witnessing important developments in the Middle East. We were encouraged by the way the Israeli Government showed great courage in implementing the withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West Bank this summer. We were also impressed by the dignified manner in which the evacuation was carried out by the Israel Defense Forces. The Israeli withdrawal was an important step towards ending the Israeli occupation and establishing a two-State solution, in accordance with the road map for peace and relevant United Nations resolutions.

We were also encouraged by the recent agreement on the Rafah border crossing between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority. The agreement has both political and practical significance. It will enable the parties to maintain the important political momentum that followed in the wake of the Gaza disengagement, and, as a confidence-building measure, it may prove conducive to an improved atmosphere of dialogue and cooperation that could further induce the parties to implement their commitments as set out in the road map. The agreement will also have positive practical implications for Palestinians, as it will enable them to travel freely and will open up trade across the border. A stable and thriving Gaza is important in order to bolster the Palestinian Authority's legitimacy and reduce extremism.

However, improving the situation in Gaza is just one of the many steps that are required in order to bring about positive developments that will ultimately lead to peace. The next challenge is to address the situation in the West Bank. The single most important thing that can be done to normalize the situation for Palestinians is to fundamentally change or abolish the closure regime. Norway therefore urges Israel to lift closures and allow free movement.

While Norway recognizes Israel's security concerns, we cannot accept the construction of the separation barrier on occupied land in the West Bank. Nor can we accept the continued construction activities in the Israeli settlements. The building of the barrier, the expansion of settlements and the construction of separate roads exclusively for the settlements are in conflict with international law and create facts on the ground that are detrimental to a contiguous and viable Palestinian State and, thus, to a peaceful solution to the conflict.

The Palestinian Authority bears a major responsibility for achieving positive political and economic development. The Palestinian Authority has achieved important results in its reform process. We encourage it to continue those reforms, particularly within the police and security sectors. Terrorism is unacceptable anywhere, at any time. The Palestinian leadership must make a strategic decision to fight terrorism, in accordance with the road map.

Norway welcomes the Palestinian elections due to take place in January. Those elections will be an important step in the consolidation of the Palestinian Authority and will strengthen the foundations for continuing the reform process. We urge the Israeli Government to take the necessary steps to contribute to the success of the elections.

Those recent developments are important steps forward in the Middle East peace process. There is no need for a new peace plan. The road map sets out all the steps necessary for restarting the process. Efforts must be made by all parties, including the international community, to seize the present opportunities and sustain the political momentum in order to foster further progress in the peace process.

Our goal is two viable States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. At this critical juncture we must join forces and do our utmost to make that vision come true.

Mr. Assaf (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his two reports on the situation in the Middle East (A/60/258 and A/60/539) and for his efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict arising from the occupation of Arab territories.

Israel has been occupying the Palestinian territories since 1967. It has separated and isolated various parts of the occupied territories, killed Palestinians, jailed them, and denied them their inalienable rights, such as the right to self-determination, political independence and the right of refugees to return. Israel continues to build the separation wall, in violation of the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, which held the wall's construction to be illegal and urged Israel to dismantle it and compensate Palestinians for damages incurred.

In Syria, Israel continues to occupy approximately 1,000 square kilometres of the Golan and refuses to withdraw to the 4 June 1967 borders. About half a million inhabitants of the Golan have been displaced. Forty-four Israeli settlements have been built, in which some 20,000 Israeli settlers now live. And now there are plans to increase the number of settlements. Israel continues to take arbitrary measures against the approximately 25,000 remaining Arab inhabitants of the Golan. Their lands are being broken up, and they are forced to take Israeli citizenship. Israel has not complied with resolution 497 (1981), which declared that the 1981 annexation of the Golan was null and void.

There are many cases of Israeli aggression in Lebanon. Israel continues to violate Lebanese sovereignty, by land, sea and air, in violation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which calls upon Israel to respect Lebanese sovereignty. There were 83 Israeli violations in the past month alone. Israeli military aircraft routinely — on an almost daily basis — violate Lebanese airspace and break the sound barrier above cities, thus terrorizing civilians and foreign tourists.

The Secretariat of the United Nations presented its assessment of events on the ground in its briefing this morning to the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, in which it listed 12 Israeli violations of Lebanon's airspace since the 21st of this month, and called on Israel to put an end to those violations, because such a course of action would help restore a degree of calm along the Blue Line.

Israel has still not released all its Lebanese prisoners. While we thank the German Government for its initiatives to achieve the liberation of a number of Lebanese prisoners, we once again invite the international community to make every possible effort to resolve that issue once and for all by ensuring the liberation of all Lebanese prisoners held in Israel.

In addition, Israel has still not provided 20 per cent of the maps of the mine fields in Lebanon, landmines that number around 400,000. Those landmines have caused the death of scores of Lebanese citizens and injured hundreds more. The situation prevents people from returning to their farmlands and planting crops.

We cannot fail to mention the question of the approximately 400,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The Lebanese Government, in close coordination with the legitimate Palestinian Authority, has taken a series of measures to improve the living conditions of the Palestinian refugees by providing services with respect to the Lebanese labour markets on the one hand, and by organizing and regulating their security situation, on the other.

We would like to reiterate Lebanon's position. Palestinian refugees must be able to return home, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). They should not be settled permanently in Lebanon, first, because they wish to return home and, secondly, because Lebanon's constitution rejects the option of permanent settlement in Lebanon. Furthermore, the settlement of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon would alter Lebanon's demographic balance.

A solution to the Middle East crisis must be based on Israel's compliance with the international community's call for its withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). All Arab States that participated in the 2002 Beirut Summit endorsed the Arab peace initiative that offered Israel peace, recognition of the State of Israel and the normalization of relations with it, in exchange for Israel's withdrawal

from the occupied Arab territories and the return of refugees. We still hope that our appeal will be accepted by Israel. Achieving peace is easy if the political will exists.

Finally, I cannot conclude my statement on the Middle East without thanking the United Nations for responding to Lebanon's appeal for help in the investigation of the assassination of the late Prime Minister, Mr. Rafik Hariri. We reaffirm our support for and trust in the Independent Investigation Commission and its head, and we express our confidence in its work. We ask all States to cooperate in a serious and sincere manner with the Commission, in conformity with Security Council resolutions 1595 (2005) and 1636 (2005).

Mr. Southcott (Australia): Last year when Australia spoke under this agenda item, we had some grave concerns about the situation in the Middle East, and our prognosis was bleak. One year later, we have seen some significant changes, and, while much remains that is of concern, we nevertheless feel there is cause for at least guarded optimism. After a long period of stagnation on negotiations and a vicious spiral of violence, some heartening steps have been made on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process — including Israel's remarkable withdrawal from Gaza. Although the Middle East continues to experience the evils of terrorism, we have been encouraged by the spirit of cooperation that has underscored the international community's efforts to eradicate that scourge.

The Australian Government has been a steadfast supporter of the spread of democracy, including in the Middle East. We believe that democracy will not only bring greater freedom to the peoples of the Middle East but also encourage a more stable and secure environment, which will, in turn, achieve the sense of security that has been so sorely lacking.

Australia believes that the sceptics who that say that democracy is a Western concept that will never take root in the Middle East are wrong. Democracy is a liberating concept that has equal relevance and application to all of the peoples of the world. Not limited by geography, culture or faith, the merits and appeal of democracy are truly universal. We have seen that when looking at the situation of the Iraqi people and the way that after decades of living under a brutal regime they have eagerly embraced the opportunity to determine their Government and shape their own future. We have also seen it this year in Lebanon, where democratic elections have taken place free from outside interference, symbolizing new-found freedom and national unity.

Those examples do not by any means exhaust the list of promising democratic developments in the region. No one should underestimate the challenges that lie ahead for the region. But the dynamics are more promising than we have seen for some time.

The establishment of a Palestinian State living in peace, security and prosperity alongside Israel remains the paramount goal of the Middle East peace process, and we were buoyed by progress made towards that objective in 2005.

Australia commended Egypt's hosting of the February summit in Sharm el-Sheih, which promoted agreement between President Abbas and Prime Minister Sharon to formally end more than four years of bloodshed. While significant in its own right, that agreement also helped pave the way for Israel's historic withdrawal from Gaza.

Australia recognized and applauded the courage and commitment shown by Prime Minister Sharon in successfully achieving Israel's disengagement from Gaza. Disengagement should bring renewed hope and an invigorated momentum to the road map to Middle East peace, and we urge both parties not to pass up this opportunity to give further impetus to the peace process.

While significant steps have indeed been taken this year and while we remain optimistic about the chances for lasting peace, we recognize the major challenges that remain. A commitment by the Palestinians to stop terrorism and incitement to further bloodshed, and by Israel to address the issue of settlements, remains pivotal.

It is incumbent on us all to help the parties to the dispute to seize the opportunities now at hand. Australia will continue to support practical measures to push the peace process forward. The secondment in 2005 of an Australian Defence Force officer to the international security sector working group, which is working with Israel and the Palestinian Authority, is just one example of the tangible contribution that we have made. We also continue to provide practical

support to the Palestinian people through our aid programme.

Iraq has come a long way since Australia spoke last year. We saw many brave Iraqis turn out to vote for a new Government on 30 January and, again, for a new constitution on 15 October. We congratulate the brave Iraqi people and wish them all the best as they prepare to vote again for a permanent Government on 15 December. Throughout the year, we have seen all sides of Iraqi politics and society begin to engage in the political process. In that, the Iraqi people have clearly demonstrated that they have chosen freedom and democracy over the dark tyranny of terrorism. That brave choice deserves all of our support, and we encourage the international community to redouble its efforts in support of Iraq and its people as they seek to create freedom and prosperity.

Iraq's neighbours have a particular role to play in stopping the flow to Iraq of terrorists and the arms and funds that would support terrorists. For its part, Australia will not falter in its commitment to Iraq as it journeys towards a stable democracy governed by the rule of law.

As a member of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Australia has worked and will continue to work constructively in support of international efforts to resolve the many outstanding questions about Iran's nuclear activities and to obtain credible assurances from Iran that its nuclear activities are for exclusively peaceful purposes.

In keeping with the concerns expressed by Secretary-General Annan in late October, Australia registered strong condemnation of Iranian President Ahmadinejad's comments calling for Israel to be wiped off the map. Such extremist views are totally unacceptable and do nothing to reassure the international community that Iran is prepared to be a responsible international citizen.

The situation in the Middle East today remains a major challenge for us all. Now is the time for the international community and the United Nations to work together and to encourage those measures which encourage stability and security for the Middle East and which will help build a better future for all of its peoples.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey): Turkey has aligned itself with the statements made by the representative of the United Kingdom on behalf of the European Union under agenda items 14 and 15, entitled, respectively, "The situation in the Middle East" and the "Question of Palestine". I would like to elaborate on a number of issues which we deem important at this critical juncture.

The withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank is indeed an encouraging development in the region. The recent agreement between the parties on the Rafah border crossing in the Gaza Strip is also an important achievement, thus strengthening expectations that a constructive environment will take hold in the region. Prospects for the resumption of the peace process within the framework of the road map have now emerged. In this context, we would like to praise the Quartet Special Envoy, Mr. James Wolfensohn, for his tireless efforts in devising a crucial reconstruction plan for the revival of the Palestinian economy.

It is our deeply held conviction that, for the attainment of long-awaited peace, security, social and economic development and progress in the Middle East, the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is essential.

The international community and, in particular, the Quartet have a crucial role to play to get the derailed peace process back on track. We must assist the two sides to seize the current opportunity for a genuine political dialogue under the road map. In that process, both parties have to stand firm against provocation by extreme elements trying to undermine the gradual, yet momentous, gains made so far. The Palestinians must carry on with their reform process, paying special attention to the rehabilitation of the security sector. Here, Israel must help in sustaining a positive atmosphere and consolidating efforts for reform.

The Gaza initiative must be followed by similar steps in the West Bank. Israeli settlement activities must come to an end. The construction of the wall should be halted. The parties must refrain from unilateral moves that might prejudge a final-status agreement. The relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace and bilateral understandings constitute the pillars of a negotiated, just, comprehensive and sustainable settlement of the conflict in the Middle East. In that framework, we believe that it is high time for the realization of the

vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, within recognized borders.

With that understanding, Turkey has been providing the Palestinian Authority with assistance in health, education, public financing, institution-building, security, tourism and agriculture under an action plan initiated in 2003. The Ramallah office of the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency became operational several months ago. We also help to promote civil society and private sector contacts to strengthen the dialogue between the two parties. Through the efforts of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey, a triangular process among the Israeli, Palestinian and Turkish business communities has been institutionalized as the Ankara Forum.

The President took the Chair.

Turkey also supports all international efforts to resolve the Middle East issue. We maintain close contacts with all sides and try to create synergy on the ground in order to further promote dialogue and cooperation. In the context of the broader picture, the international community should always bear in mind the potential impact of other tracks on the much desired and long awaited environment of lasting peace and security in the Middle East.

The Syrian and Lebanese tracks need to be reactivated so that a peaceful, stable and prosperous environment for all the peoples of the Middle East can be achieved. For its part, Turkey stands ready to work with the international community to contribute to the resumption of tangible progress on all tracks of the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Konuzin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): In the course of the year since our last discussion on the subject of a Palestinian-Israeli settlement, at the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly, significant changes have occurred in the Middle East peace process. We have experienced many anxious moments when it seemed that the fragile understanding between the parties had been hopelessly destroyed. Mutual distrust by the Israelis and the Palestinians; their guarded attitude towards each other; the attacks by extremists; all of that called into question the prospect of a settlement.

In our view, however, there were more positive events. The year 2005 was marked by a major, historic event, Israel's withdrawal from northern Gaza and from part of the West Bank. The fact that the disengagement plan became a reality is to the credit of the Government of Israel and a result of the responsible position adopted by the Palestinian Authority. But the liberation of that Palestinian territory, occupied in 1967, should be followed by further steps, with a view to a final settlement on the basis of the road map — irreplaceable, fundamental document which defines the parameters of Palestinian-Israeli reconciliation.

The Government of Mr. Abbas must be helped in its efforts to create security and order in the Palestinian territories. We are convinced that the Palestinian leadership should continue its efforts to reform its power structures, and firmly counter any manifestations of terrorism.

It is essential to improve the humanitarian, social and economic situation of the population in the Palestinian territories. Accordingly, we welcome the agreement on movement and access that was concluded on 15 November between Israel and the Palestinians, and we call upon the parties to strictly comply with and implement it. The international community — as represented by the Quartet and its Special Envoy, Mr. Wolfensohn — should continue to focus its attention on all of those tasks.

Together with other members of the Quartet of Middle East facilitators, Russia intends to help build Palestinian statehood. At the same time, I wish to emphasize that we deem inadmissible any kind of unilateral measures that would prejudge the solution to the question of the final status of Palestinian lands. Israeli settlement activity in all its manifestations is unacceptable to us, as is the continuing construction of the separation wall.

It is very important now to allow the positive momentum resulting from the evacuation of the Israeli settlements in Gaza to fade away. Therefore, the international facilitators and all interested parties should urge Israel and the Palestinians to ensure that the interaction that emerged with the withdrawal from Gaza continues in the post-evacuation period as well.

We must all keep in mind the final goal: the creation of an independent, viable Palestinian State coexisting in peace and security with Israel. However, we cannot fail to note that the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict alone, without a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East, will not

make it possible to eliminate tension and achieve peace and security in the region. Therefore, the international community must again devote constant attention to the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the peace process, as they are just as significant and important.

Ms. García-Matos (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela rejects intervention upon and violation of the territorial integrity of any State. The Republic believes that there is no excuse for a State to invade or occupy another.

That is why we support the series of General Assembly resolutions that, year after year, have condemned Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan since 1967 and called for the withdrawal of the occupation forces. The Republic vigorously rejects the ongoing occupation of the Syrian Golan and urges the Government of Israel to withdraw its forces. Ours is a position of principle, based on our Constitution.

We also believe that, in order to maintain international peace, relations among States must be based on strict respect for sovereignty and the general norms and principles of international law, in particular the principle of territorial integrity.

We also welcome the willingness of the Syrian Government, and in particular of President Bashar Al-Assad, to resume negotiations on the basis of the 1991 Madrid peace process. In that respect, we urge the Government of Israel to resume negotiations and to withdraw completely from the entire occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967.

The Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela also wishes to highlight its support for the draft resolution entitled "Jerusalem" and to join its voice to the hundreds of millions of voices around the world urging Israel to end the occupation of the Arab territories begun in 1967, including Jerusalem. Any measure taken by Israel in any occupied Arab territory is null and void, as recognized by international norms. The United Nations must continue to work to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and to adopt measures to reverse the situation of the heroic and long-suffering Palestinian people.

That is why we urge delegations to vote in favour of the draft resolutions on the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine. Any conduct that runs counter to the United Nations Charter, such as the annexation of territories, must always be repudiated by the international community as a whole.

Mr. Sardenberg (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the delegations of Argentina and Brazil on agenda item 14, "The situation in the Middle East".

In the year that has elapsed since the last debate of the General Assembly on that issue, several positive developments have taken place in the Middle East. Noteworthy among them are the Palestinian presidential elections of 9 January 2005; the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings of 8 February; Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and four settlements of the West Bank, which was concluded by mid-September; and the Agreement on Movement and Access and the Agreed Principles for the Rafah Crossing signed on 15 November, which made possible the reopening of that strategic crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt a few days ago.

Argentina and Brazil welcome those auspicious and positive developments, which allow us to entertain a degree of optimism about future prospects. However, as has been repeatedly demonstrated over the past year, the progress towards peace and mutual recognition is negatively affected by the ups and downs of the fragile situation on the ground and the forces of moderation have not always prevailed over those of extremism and violence.

We therefore consider it essential that the progress be accompanied by concrete measures that contribute to building more confidence between the parties, establishing channels of dialogue between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority on all aspects of the road map, and ultimately relaunching the peace process.

We believe that the road map is the best tool at our disposal to advance peace negotiations with a view to the creation of an independent, sovereign, democratic, viable and territorially contiguous State of Palestine living side by side with Israel in peace and security. To achieve that goal, both parties must be ready to make concessions and accept long-term commitments that respond to the fundamental needs and concerns of the other party.

In that regard, the Palestinian Authority should take measures to address Israel's legitimate security needs. It should therefore continue with the reform and

strengthening of its security services and exercise its monopoly over the use of force in the territory under its control.

Argentina and Brazil believe that it is essential to ensure the safety and well-being of all civilians in the Middle East. We condemn all acts of violence and terror against civilians on both sides, including suicide bombings, extrajudicial executions and the excessive use of force.

The parties must understand that the conflict will be solved only through peaceful means and that resort to violence will not contribute to the achievement of their objectives. In the final analysis, the main lesson learned over the past five years has been that violence and terrorism have diminished the prospects for peaceful coexistence between two States and have not enhanced them.

Israel should adequately address the legitimate Palestinian aspirations to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State. To that end, it should freeze all settlement-related activities and dismantle illegal outposts in accordance with the road map. Similarly, it should cease the construction of the separation barrier and adjust its route so as not to create facts on the ground that could prejudge the final borders.

The living conditions in the Palestinian territories should visibly improve and in that regard it is essential to guarantee the freedom of movement of people and goods within Gaza and the West Bank and between both territories, and to facilitate links with the rest of the world. If concrete measures are not taken to respond to those legitimate Palestinian concerns, it will be very difficult for the President of the Palestinian Authority to convince his people that peaceful negotiations with Israel will indeed lead to the creation of a viable and contiguous State.

The international community has an important role to play in the process, especially in establishing conditions for a fruitful and sustainable dialogue between the parties. Some recent experiences, in particular the Gaza withdrawal and the opening of the Gaza crossing, have shown that the active involvement of the members of the Quartet and other relevant international actors can make a difference when the parties by themselves seem unable to reach an agreement. However, the international community cannot impose a resumption of negotiations; Israelis and Palestinians must take the required bold steps in order to comply with their mutual commitments and obligations.

Peace and stability in the Middle East is dependent on the achievement of concrete progress with regard not only to the Israeli-Palestinian track but also to other aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is therefore indispensable that the parties resume their contacts with a view to putting an end to the situations of occupation that continue to exist in the region, in violation of international law.

We call once again for the resumption of peace talks between Israel and Syria concerning the Golan Heights, occupied since June 1967.

With respect to the situation in southern Lebanon, we reiterate our call on the parties fully to respect the Blue Line and to refrain from taking any measures that could increase tensions in the area. The events of 21 November were extremely serious and underline once again the fact that all actors involved must abide by the provisions of the relevant United Nations resolutions.

We would like to take this opportunity to restate our position on the status of Jerusalem. A definitive solution to that question must take into account the legitimate concerns of both Israelis and Palestinians. In that context, we would voice our concern at the unilateral measures taken by Israel in the outskirts of Jerusalem, especially with respect to settlement activities and the construction of the separation wall. Such measures increase the isolation of the city from the remaining occupied territories, have a detrimental effect on the lives of the Palestinian people and could prejudge a definitive agreement on the status of the city.

In conclusion, I should like to express our recognition for the role being played by the United Nations in the quest for a solution to the various issues relating to peace in the Middle East. We value the deployment of United Nations agencies on the ground so as to mitigate the suffering of the Palestinian people. We also believe that the Organization and its main bodies, in particular the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Secretariat, must play an important role in promoting the peace process in the Middle East.

Argentina and Brazil will continue to support all international efforts aimed at promoting the legitimate

aspirations of all the peoples in the region and at translating into reality the vision of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003); the Madrid terms of reference; the principle of land for peace; and the statement issued by the Arab League at the Beirut summit in 2002.

Mr. Djacta (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): I wish to add the name of my country to the list of sponsors of the two draft resolutions introduced by Egypt, A/60/L.32 and A/60/L.33, on the Middle East.

The President: The statement by the representative of Algeria is duly noted.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.